

# CANAUTO

VOLUME 1 / NUMBER 4 / \$4.95 / AUGUST 2007 / [www.canautomag.com](http://www.canautomag.com)

MODERN FLEET MANAGEMENT



Industry Focus

## Canadian Fleet Conference 2007

TED HALL AND STEVE MACALUSO

**REGISTER NOW!**  
2007  
CANADIAN  
**FLEET**  
CONFERENCE  
SEPTEMBER 18-20  
[www.nafa.org/canadianconference07](http://www.nafa.org/canadianconference07)

PHOTO: JIMMY HARRIS



Jill McIntosh [jill@ca.inter.net](mailto:jill@ca.inter.net)

A BRAND-NEW CHOICE FOR LIGHT-LOAD DELIVERIES

## Special Delivery: The Chevrolet HHR Panel

**I**n the world of delivery vehicles, there's a niche that, up until now, hasn't really been addressed: your cargo is too big or awkward for a small car, but a full-size van is overkill, especially on tight city streets. Chevrolet has now answered it with the 2007 HHR Panel.

Based on the popular HHR sedan, the Panel shares the passenger version's body, chassis and cockpit, but replaces the rear windows with sheet-metal panels, and swaps the sedan's back seat for a flat, plastic cargo platform. Two rubber mats keep items from sliding around, and there are ten tie-down points across the cargo area.

### Keeping the price down

Because so little is changed between the two versions, GM has kept the price to within a few hundred dollars of the passenger sedan: in LS trim, with a 2.2-litre four-cylinder engine, the HHR Panel starts at \$19,480, while the LT, with 2.4-litre four-cylinder, is \$22,120. Both prices include a five-speed manual transmission, air conditioning, power windows and mirrors, power locks with keyless entry, cruise control and CD stereo; a four-speed automatic transmission is an extra \$1,260. Most of the options from the sedan can be added to the panel version, including the anti-lock brakes (an extra \$600), sunroof, and upgraded stereo, but most fleets will probably just get the base version (which really isn't all that bare-bones). The only Panel-specific option is a \$35 pair of key locks for the car's two standard under-floor storage compartments, which are located behind the seats and are accessible through the rear doors.

### Well-suited for urban work

I used the 2.2-litre LS and drove a friend's auto parts delivery route for a day to test the vehicle's mettle. The smaller engine isn't a powerhouse – neither of them are, really – but overall, it's well-suited for

the daily grind of urban deliveries, and my real-world fuel economy came fairly close to the published combined average of 8.6 L/100 km (32 mpg Imp) on regular gas. The tall roofline accommodates a wide variety of drivers; my 6-foot-3 friend had no problems fitting behind the wheel while, at 5-foot-4, I was comfortable and could reach everything very well.

Removing the back door handles gives the HHR its retro sedan-delivery look; the rear doors can be popped open electrically via dash-mounted switches, or manually by reaching in and pushing the inner handles, left over from the passenger sedan. The top-hinged liftgate opens conventionally, giving three points of entry for easier loading.

### A rolling billboard

The flat sides do create blind spots – the automaker currently doesn't offer convex truck mirrors, and most buyers will probably clip on additional aftermarket ones – but it can be turned into a huge rolling billboard for a company logo, without the difficulty of wrapping a vinyl decal across a window frame. The closed panels also offer more security against prying eyes, and sun protection for light- or heat-sensitive cargo.

The cargo area is 148 cm long (58 inches); the passenger seat folds flat, extending it up to a length of 250 cm (8 feet). Vehicle payload is 408 kg (900 lbs), and both engines will tow up to 454 kg (1,000 lbs). That's small potatoes compared to a full-size van, but for smaller loads, the HHR Panel represents a lower purchase price, lower operating cost, and a more manoeuvrable vehicle.

GM says it expects the HHR Panel to be a low-volume seller, but I think that will change once businesses look at it. If a van's too big and a car's not enough, this little delivery may be just the ticket. ▶